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DCI BRIEFING  
FOR HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

LAOS

I. Vientiane now is firmly back in the hands of the regional military authorities following last week's showdown fighting between rival rightist military factions.

A. The crisis was touched off by an attempt on the part of some discontented colonels, probably acting with the encouragement of General Phoumi Nosavan, to take control of the rightist military establishment.

B. When this move appeared to be foundering, Phoumi assumed active leadership of the dissidents.

(MAP, Laos)

C. Although Phoumi received some support from General Khamkhong in Pak Sane to the east, his forces never made much headway. By Wednesday night General Kouprasith, commander of the Fifth Region embracing Vientiane,

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had driven Phoumi's forces--as well as police units under General Siho--from the capital.

D. ~~The whereabouts and activities of Phoumi and Siho are unknown. It seems likely, however, that they will try to rally support from out-~~  
~~lying units.~~ <sup>have fled,</sup>

E. Premier Souvanna has indicated he may appoint former Premier Boun Oum to replace Phoumi in the coalition government.

II. Meanwhile, the Communists are increasing their pressure at various points throughout Laos.

A. In the Thakhek area of central Laos, the Communists have resumed operations similar to the forays they conducted early last December.

1. During the past week, enemy forces--reportedly in battalion strength--launched attacks against government regular and guerrilla forces near Route 13, about 20 to 25 miles southeast of Thakhek.

B. Recent reports suggest that the Communists in the north may be preparing another clearing operation against regular and guerrilla forces around Muong Sai, north of Luang Prabang, and southwest of Sam Neua.

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C. Communist reinforcements have also moved into the hills northwest of Ban Ban, presumably for the purpose of increasing the security of Route 7 road from North Vietnam to the Plaine des Jarres.

III. The Communists are continuing to move additional forces into Laos.

A. North Vietnam has moved substantial numbers of troops into Laos along Route 7 and 12, with the principal concentrations located near the Plaine des Jarres, east of Thakhek in central Laos, and in the Tchepone-Muong Phine area farther south.

1. North Vietnamese troop strength in Laos now probably exceeds 9 to 11,000 men.

2. Pathet Lao strength has remained relatively constant at about 20,000 men.

IV. There are no firm indications that the Communists intend to launch a major offensive against Lao government positions in the strategic Mekong Valley.

A. North Vietnam clearly has its eyes fixed on developments in South Vietnam. This, together with concern over possible

strong US reaction, may account for the  
apparent willingness of the Communists in  
Laos to absorb stepped-up air operations  
against them without any military reaction.

